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SIPDIS

SIPDIS, SENSITIVE, SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

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TAGS: [EAIR](#) [ECON](#) [AU](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN AIRLINES SUSPENDS FLIGHTS TO IRAQ

REF: A) STOCKHOLM 987 B) 06 Vienna 609

¶1. (SBU) Austrian Airlines' (AUA) International Relations Manager Bernadette Strobl-Wirz confirmed to us on August 27 that AUA had temporarily suspended its regularly-scheduled service to the northern Iraqi city of Irbil. Strobl-Wirz said that the suspension was based on a security evaluation following the alleged missile attack on a Nordic Airways passenger plane departing Sulemaniya on August 9 (ref A).

¶2. (U) In an August 26 press statement announcing the suspension, AUA CEO Alfred Oetsch stressed that the security of passengers and colleagues remained AUA's top priority. Oetsch added that AUA will decide whether or not to resume service following a thorough evaluation of the security situation.

¶3. (SBU) According to Strobl-Wirz, the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, the Kurdish regional government, and Iraq's Ambassador to Austria have contacted AUA to register their concerns about the suspension of the Irbil flights. AUA will meet with senior representatives of the regional government on August 28 to explain the suspension. Strobl-Wirz promised to inform the Embassy of any further developments regarding its Irbil route.

¶4. (SBU) AUA inaugurated regularly-scheduled service to Irbil in December 2006 (ref B). AUA has since expanded the twice-weekly Vienna-Irbil service to four flights per week to meet growing demand. AUA told post that it now uses larger planes - Airbus 320s - on the route because of the higher volume, but also to increase range, should a security concern necessitate a diversion to another airport in the region.

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